

# Newspaperwoman

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## City Desk

I AM no feminist.

If I were asked what I regard as the woman's place, I'd probably give the old-fashioned answer: In the home.

However, I'm not one of those women who, because they must go to work five days a week to earn their own living, think that the homebody has a cinch lolling about the house. It is true that too many women do just that. Despite their mascara and expensive-clothes pretenses, they are failures. What causes them to whine as wives would make them bleaters on jobs, where they would be more interested in drawing their wages than in producing what they are paid to do.

The efficient housewife's day, I realize, is busy. Cooking imaginatively so that food does not taste like sodden sawdust; keeping the house, including the kitchen and the bathroom, clean; shopping, sewing, mending, washing, ironing, canning and preserving, and keeping herself fresh and cheerful—that's one hell of a big job.

Nevertheless, the housewife may have leisure for herself, her husband, and her children if she arranges her duties in an orderly way. While her more "modern" sisters strive or loaf around in the business or professional world, the housewife may make her life the greatest "career" of all. And millions of women do it—efficiently—without nagging husbands and children into irritations and frustrations that wind up in the City Hall Tower divorce courts.

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Well, it may be inquired, if I think so damn much of cooking and housekeeping, why the hell don't I get myself back into the kitchen?

If I were asked to answer that question, I might say that's a good idea, and, if I did, I'd be telling a great big lie.

City editor or not, I still do my cooking, washing, and ironing when I get home from work weekdays and on Saturdays and Sundays. But I'd be daffy if I thought I'd be content away from the newspaper profession.

Twenty-two years ago, I got a bear by the tail and couldn't let it go. Newspapering has become my life, and I fear I'd be miserably unhappy if, while I'm in my prime years, I should forego, or be crowded out of, my calling.

I do not regard the fact that I am city editor of a metropolitan newspaper as a triumph in emancipation of womanhood, equality of the sexes—or votes for wimmin.

I realize, nonetheless, that recent attention which has come my way results largely from the novelty of a woman's presiding at the city desk of one of the nation's great dailies, the Los Angeles *Evening Herald and Express*. There still is amazement over a woman's being advanced in what is presumed to be an exclusively masculine domain to direct a staff of city-side reporters and photographers, in addition to other administrative duties.

Women are not newcomers in the profession, a fact affirmed by Walter Winchell in occasional columns on their activities in the past. The profession has not been inhospitable to them. Many are competent all-around newspapermen—I use the term as inclusive of both genders, for I do not view this calling as a battle of the sexes.

There is a fallacy by which newspaperwomen, because they are females, are condemned as a class. A seasoned

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reporter is cautious about all generalizations, and it is incongruous, therefore, when an otherwise experienced newspaperman lapses into condemnation that a little checking would disclose as not substantial. It would be just as unreasonable to condemn all newspapermen as a class.

As I see it, the test, if there must be one, is whether the person is able to do the work he or she claims to be able to do. When Charles Williams, a veteran newspaperman, interviewed me for *Newsweek*, he asked, "Do you think there should be more newspaperwomen?" I replied, "I think there should be more good ones."

Beyond that, I have no patience with the newspaperman-versus-newspaperwoman controversy. It seems as archaic as a debate on whether women should be allowed to vote. And I'll admit their enfranchisement hasn't changed conditions a great deal—or, perhaps, that supports my point, if indeed I'm trying to make one.

Nor do I believe a newspaperwoman must be confined to the so-called woman's angle. I've known men reporters who can bring out the feminine point of view with skill superior to that of many female reporters. In the departments, society pages are supposed to interest women predominantly; yet there are male society editors.

Being able to do the work is not a matter of sex.

Florabel Muir, *Daily Variety* columnist and for years New York *Daily News* correspondent in Los Angeles and Hollywood, is not only a great reporter; she is an all-around newspaperman. She is capable of handling a story from reporting through all its stages, including copy-reading and head-writing, to the point where the type goes on the stone for makeup and the compositor locks up the form and rolls the page to the stereotyper.

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The superlative abilities of Marjorie Driscoll of the Los Angeles *Examiner* are admired unabashedly by the most competent newspapermen—and newspaperwomen—in Los Angeles, San Francisco, and the West. After journalistic triumphs in San Francisco, Miss Driscoll transferred to L.A., where her achievements became even more noteworthy.

Caroline Walker, *Herald-Express* women's club editor, works brilliantly as a reporter or a feature writer. It's a happy day when I can borrow Caroline from her clubs coverage to write a news feature. Her copy never fails; always it merits a top spot "over the fold" on the front page.

In small measure these pages will contain an attempt to record my appreciation of Gertrude Price, whom I first knew when she was women's editor of the old Los Angeles *Record*, and who has forgotten more about newspapering than many of the self-proclaimed authorities ever will know. A managing editor is happy when he is able to hire a newspaperman as thorough as Miss Price.

After I was assigned to the city desk, a barrage of females presented themselves to "take my place" as the woman reporter on city-side. What they evidently overlooked was the fact that I had worked as a reporter—that I hadn't held down my job because I was a woman.

I didn't hire any of them—not because I was a jealous cat wanting to fend off possible successors; rather, interviewing them disclosed that they didn't possess the equipment of competent reporters.

I still haven't hired a woman, and that forbearance doesn't arise from prejudice. If and when there's a spot and an available woman whose qualifications outweigh those of other applicants, men or women, she'll get the job. As it is, there are few openings on the *Herald-Express* city-side staff.

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I want a stable staff, not a revolving door through which reporters enter, hired, and then are whisked out, canned. In hectic turnover, instability may not be blamed on the staff exclusively. They can't all be out of step—and the city editor the only guy keeping pace.

I know something about city editors. I've worked for enough of them—good, bad, and indifferent.

What I shall have to say in this book I shall say not as a city-desk newcomer who would set herself up as an upstart oracle. Throughout the country there are city editors with a long record of wise and experienced service. None of my comments should be construed as an effort to hurl pointers at the men who run their city desks so capably. Rather, I am writing from the perspective of those among whom I was numbered for years—the reporters. I figure that, as a city editor, a responsible part of my job is to keep the reporters happy and interested in their work. And, as I say, reporters know city editors.

I know about the school which holds that "all city editors are sonsofbitches." Some even are proud of the insult, like the efficient one who called a new reporter to the city desk and, indicating reporters at their typewriters, said, "You see all of those guys out there? They all think I'm a sonofabitch. Well, I think they're all sonsofbitches too. So don't get any ideas that we're one big happy family around here—because we're not."

I don't think I'd want to work where I believed I was surrounded with sonsofbitches, nor would I care to draw a paycheck from what I regarded as a sonofabitch outfit. I'd quit and try to find another job.

The period is passing when a city editor may whip reporters and photographers like dogs. Of course, there's still

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the sulking kind. While I was covering the "Black Dahlia" case, I was put in the doghouse for obscure reasons which I cannot fathom to this day. I was on top of the story, hadn't misbehaved, and was doing what the town considered good work.

That case, which shocked the entire country in January 1947, and is still unsolved at this writing, was the worst butcher murder I was ever assigned to. I was the first reporter to arrive on Coliseum Drive, where the "Black Dahlia's" body was found. A few blocks west were the Baldwin Hills where ten years before Albert Dyer, a WPA street-crossing guard, had garroted and violated the "three little Babes of Inglewood"—an area to which more than one killer has skulked to leave his dead. One of four radio patrolmen, who had arrived ahead of homicide detectives, tried to stop me. I said I was from the *Herald-Express* and brushed past him. I've learned that to halt for explanations brings arguments and wastes time.

In a vacant lot amid sparse weeds a couple of feet from the sidewalk lay the body. It had been cut in half through the abdomen, under the ribs. The two sections were ten or twelve inches apart. The arms, bent at right angles at the elbows, were raised above the shoulders. The legs were spread apart. There were bruises and cuts on the forehead and the face, which had been beaten severely. The hair was blood-matted. Front teeth were missing. Both cheeks were slashed from the corners of the lips almost to the ears. The liver hung out of the torso, and the entire lower section of the body had been hacked, gouged, and unprintably desecrated. It showed sadism at its most frenzied.

Some of the police argued that she was a woman of thirty-six. Noting the youthful condition of the breasts and the

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smooth thighs, I said she was much younger. When she was identified as Elizabeth Short, a girl who had come from Medford, Massachusetts, and worked around an army camp, her age was established at twenty-two.

The "Black Dahlia" tag which the case assumed was dug out one day when we all were combing blind alleys and I was checking with Ray Giese, homicide detective-lieutenant, for any stray fact that might have been overlooked. Later, in the squad room, he said, "This is something you might like, Agness. I've found out they called her the 'Black Dahlia' around that drug store where she hung out down in Long Beach." The term resulted from the slinky black clothes she affected.

After Robert M. (Red) Manley, twenty-five, salesman, turned up as a hot suspect, I interviewed him early on the morning of January 20, in the jail at Hollenbeck police station on the east side.

"You look as if you've been on a drunk," I said in sizing up the suspect. I was ready to talk sympathetically about hangovers. That approach won't work always, but Red looked like a guy reporters might meet at a bar and find a congenial drinking companion, possible criminal or not.

"This is worse than any I've ever been on," he replied. Perry Fowler, the photographer assigned to the case with me, caught the cue we had used repeatedly in softening subjects and stepped forward with a cigarette, which Manley took gratefully.

"Look, fella," I continued as he inhaled. "You're in one hell of a spot. You're in a jam and it's no secret. If you're innocent as you say you are, tell the whole story; and if you haven't anything to hide, people can't help knowing you're telling the truth. That way, you'll get it over with

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all at once and it won't be kicking around to cause you more trouble."

"She's right," said Harry S. Fremont, homicide detective. "Tell her everything that happened. I've known this lady for a long time, on lots of big cases, and I can tell you she won't do you wrong."

I primed Manley with a few preliminary queries. Then he began to talk, and I didn't interrupt. Know-it-all questions may botch an interview, especially one like this, and throw it off the track. I had hoped I had the interview bottled exclusively but opposition reporters who had trailed me appeared. Wisely, they didn't cut in. Seeing I had the suspect going, they let me prompt him back in line when he lagged.

Manley told of having picked up the girl on a street corner in San Diego and of later having passed an erotically uneventful night with her in a motel. He had driven her back to Los Angeles and dropped her at the Biltmore one week before her body was found; this was the last record of her alive.

"I'll never pick up another dame as long as I live," he said at one point.

That interview, carried in the *Herald-Express* in paragraph after paragraph of continuous bold-face quotes, established Red Manley's innocence. There was the resonance of truthfulness in what he had to say. It's the sort of story that John B. T. Campbell, managing editor, who usually barks, "Keep that copy short," expertly dummies with art on the front page, jumps inside and lets run for what it's worth. Astutely he knows what the public wants to read.

The homicide detective knew what he was doing when he advised Manley to unburden to me. The interview was crucial and could tip the investigative scales for or against

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Manley. As it happened, he eliminated himself by his own straightforwardness, and the police got him out of their hair. As an unbiased reporter, I held no brief for or against the suspect. I was there to extract the facts for the public to read, that's all. If the facts free the innocent or help to bring the guilty to justice, then, in the wider interpretation, all society gains.

A sob sister could have wept with and over Manley, interpolating editorial gushes to prove what a big bleeding heart beat in her breast. To hell with that. I'd rather have a fistful—an armload—of good solid facts, preferably quotes like Red Manley's. Then the story writes itself. Just give it a lead to fit the facts.

That was the story I was in the midst of covering when without warning or explanation, then or later, the city editor benched me and let me sit in the local room without a blessed thing to do.

That's the most difficult of all jobs for me—and he knew it. As I parked hour after hour I became jittery. After a couple of days of inactivity I got my Irish up. "Well," I thought, "if he thinks he can snag me in that fancy work of his, I guess I know what to do."

Early the next morning the no-assignment routine resumed. I stood it for three hours more. Then I brought out my own fancy work—and began embroidering. I kept my head down to my hoops. Pretty soon I heard snickers. Caroline Walker, who seldom raises her voice, approached my desk and laughed out loud.

"What do you think of that? Here's the best reporter on the *Herald*, on the biggest day of one of the best stories in years—sitting in the office doing fancy work!"

I didn't look city-deskward, but they tell me that along

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about then the city editor was busy keeping his head down to his chores. Stubbornly, he stuck by his stand. Through the rest of the day, he let me stitch while the staff and press agents and other office visitors roared. Although I got damn tired of it, I kept my needle going until the quitting hour. Early the next morning the assistant city editor announced that the city editor had made an overnight assignment for me to go back to homicide and continue on the "Black Dahlia" case.

And again I was pulled off it. That second time was when I presently was assigned to the city desk. Completely unwarmed, I was the most surprised person in Los Angeles. If I had fears they were drowned in astonishment mixed with a panicky resolution to avoid the desk. But I had never been insubordinate; that was my new assignment, and it was up to me to take it and to try to make good.

In years as a reporter I recognized as an occupational gripe the illusion of some reporters that they could be better city editors if they were given whacks at the desk. That sort of covert envy classifies them with the stenographer who thinks she knows more than her boss. Hundreds sit at city desks; there are few city editors.

I had stored no notions about making a "big showing" before I was assigned to the desk. What I immediately determined, however, was that I would not break out with a rash of executivitis. As a result, from the very beginning, the staff never has questioned my authority, woman or not.

Strangely, there have been maneuvers among divers press agents to ignore this authority. A gentleman who once stood supinely by while my photographer and I were accused of stealing at a dance we were covering at the Ambassador still comes in, as he has for years. In the beginning he tried

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to plant his copy around the fringes of the city desk. Whenever I asked him what he wanted, he sputtered that he was waiting to see somebody else. His dodges were futile; his city-side plantings had to clear through me before going to the copy desk. Lately he has become reconciled to the fact that my city editorship cannot be by-passed.

A press agent who once gave Ed Phillips, another photographer, and me a bad time at the Ambassador during the visit of Madame Chiang Kai-shek, crossed paths again with Ed at a hotel event in Beverly Hills following Margaret Truman's concert at Hollywood Bowl. Ed, who took effective photographs of Miss Truman (for which President Truman later wrote him a letter of thanks), was asked by the publicity man for prints of shots made at the hotel. When Ed refused, the request became a demand, then a threat to phone the *Herald-Express* city desk to force Ed to furnish the photographs. "Go ahead," Ed said, "and see what answer you'll get. Agness Underwood is city editor now. Remember?" The press agent didn't telephone; I received a call from another publicist who requested the pictures. He worked for a free-lance agency and denied he was a cat's-paw for the press agent at the hotel. After all, we're not in the business of donating or selling prints intended for reproduction in the paper.

One Marine captain, who identified himself as a public-relations officer, telephoned Mr. Campbell, my managing editor, who was on vacation at La Jolla, about coverage of Marine maneuvers. Later the captain phoned me that Mr. Campbell had ordered assignment of a reporter. The captain has since learned to consult the city desk about city-side assignments. We may thank heaven that the high-brass showed better sense in picking personnel for fighting the

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challenged, "So you stole a million dollars and now that you've been caught up with you're putting it back to keep from being prosecuted. Is that it?" On a queried story he said, "Well, we'll use it; it's legitimate news. But I have the feeling there's a trick somewhere. I shouldn't say it, because I can't prove it, but it'll come out one of these days: I think they've got to that sonofabitch with a block of stock."

## 6

## Cops and Crime

WHY, gahdammit, the *Herald* has thought up the tag on every important crime story in Los Angeles during the last thirty-five years."

That cigar-chewing-punctuated protest once was fired by Mr. Campbell at the correspondent of a national news magazine, which mistakenly had attributed the dubbing of a murder to another Los Angeles daily.

Preoccupied always with giving readers the "substantial" news which reflects what causes the largest city in the West to tick, Mr. Campbell nevertheless is as eager as the most enthusiastic reporter during developments in a big murder or kidnaping. Part of that eagerness centers on effectively identifying a case with a "tag"—tied to pertinent facts. These christenings frequently are floral. Among them have been "the red hibiscus," "the black dahlia," and "the orchid" slayings. And, with the roll of alliteration, through four seductive r's, a "red rose murder" would always be good. It sounds like "class" as well as homicide.

For more than a decade before I was assigned to the city desk, I usually was the reporter who spearheaded Mr. Campbell's determination that the *Herald-Express* be "first with the latest" on these stories.

As the result of my covering criminal cases, various publications have referred to me as a crime reporter. I never regarded myself as one. I was a barnyard kind of general-assignment reporter. Moreover, "crime reporter" sounds

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strange to Los Angeles newspaper ears, which are not used to the term prevalent in other parts.

Nor have I been a police reporter in the sense of having covered the police or the sheriff's beats. There are competent police reporters in Los Angeles, including James Shambra, the *Herald-Express*' topsider; J. L. (Barney) Barnard, thorough *Herald* veteran, who is dean of the sheriff's beat; Stanley Bruce and B. L. (Bevo) Means of the *Herald-Express*; Pat Shepard, the *Times*' expert, who, two-fisted with the cops, has the instincts of a poet and proves it with exquisite verse. They are good men.

On big stories such reporters are the sentinels, flashing their offices when a hot one breaks, then standing by their beats and handling the grist while general-assignment reporters are sent where the flame is burning brightest. And these police reporters, loyal and not jealous, are there to back them up by checking records or unraveling knots like the occasional recalcitrance of a cop.

As a general-assignment reporter I must have worked thousands of crime stories, many of which were buried and forgotten for years until I began checking through more than thirty-three thousand editions in the back files. Then my memory of these cases was refreshed by headlines which, as unrelated as the chores dealt a general-assignment reporter, recalled still other stories I covered. A cross section of these headlines indicates the versatility expected of one:

“Ma’s Marriage Annulled, She Collapses; May Sue Aimee” (July 23, 1931); “Sorry for Dave’s Mother, Says Spencer Widow” (August 17, 1931); “Find L.A. School Unsafe After It was Given OK” (April 5, 1933); “How Aimee Stayed 3 Day in Arab’s Tent as Sandstorm Raged” (August 17, 1933); “Doheny Kidnap Plot in Killing” (September 21,

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1933); "Huston's Son's Car Kills Actor's Wife" (September 28, 1933); "Dead Racer's Wife Says Hospital Refused Him" (March 7, 1934); "Hold Nellie Madison, Woman Sobs When Inquest Verdict Given" (March 29, 1934); "Suit Upsets Sally Eilers" (April 3, 1934); "Hungry Ex-Wife Slays Hollywood Astrologer" (October 1, 1934); "Crash Quiz Faces Busby Berkeley" (August 9, 1935); "Find Thelma Todd, Film Star, Dead in Mystery" (December 16, 1935); "Find Stone Believed Death Weapon in Moonlight Murder" (September 2, 1936); "Santa Barbara Wins Rose Parade Sweeps Prize" (January 1, 1937); "Heroine in Vain Try to Save Two in Fire, Near Death" (April 29, 1937); "Film Star Jean Harlow Dies in Sudden Relapse" (June 7, 1937); "3 Missing Inglewood Tots Found Murdered" (June 28, 1937); "First Lady Has Press Conference" (March 17, 1938); "L.A. Signs Up for Draft" (October 16, 1940); "Folks From All Walks of Life in Tribute to Tom Mix" (October 16, 1940); "North American Union Near Accord" (June 28, 1941); "Girl in Dance Murder Probe Tells Downward Path" (November 23, 1943); "Mrs. Peete Tells Own Story" (December 22, 1944); "Girl-Hungry G-I Tells Own Story of Tragedy" (October 26, 1945), and so on through the years.

Besides the homicides or cases of national attention, there were hundreds of others, one- or two-day minor meteors which provided arresting art for the front page, page three, or page one of the second section.

Covering the littler ones, usually with Perry or some other photographer on the early-morning milk route, sharpened my ability to cope with big-time cases. Aside from central homicide and headquarters, this route carried to eleven out-lying police division stations as well as twelve sheriff's sub-stations in unincorporated metropolitan and rural areas. Then

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there were the separate police departments among the forty-five incorporated cities and towns in Los Angeles County.

In addition, we came in contact with the California Highway Patrol, district attorney investigators, the F.B.I. and private detectives. Private investigators like George Woods or Harry J. Raymond—the former police executive who was blasted almost to death when his automobile was time-bombed in a Los Angeles political war—are uncanny in their operations. Woods, avoiding swashbuckling, is effective as an investigator for defense attorneys. Occasionally the state government will start or enter a probe, sometimes, one suspects despite avowals of high-minded motives, when a politician needs publicity.

Like other reporters, I have found the F.B.I., despite its splendid and respected batting average, the least co-operative of all the agencies, public or private. J. Edgar Hoover personally is gracious and talks good copy. His men, usually courteous and intelligent, will not, or are afraid to, talk and shrink from confirming or denying even an innocuous tidbit; all the while the energetic reporter may know that the mighty G-men are sitting on, and smothering, details in a local story—which will be “released,” if and when, under a Washington dateline or in what is similar to a publicity handout, written or verbal.

Capable, patriotic, J. Edgar Hoover no doubt has reasons for his methods, which have made the F.B.I. great. However, those methods do not always help a local reporter or a photographer covering a local story for a local newspaper.

While I have worked innumerable cases investigated by the F.B.I., I've been on more that have been handled by the Los Angeles Police Department. As for co-operation, the department, under its present chief, C. B. Horrall, tries to

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maintain a civilized relationship with reporters and photographers so that readers may have facts with which to make up their own minds. If a cop becomes unreasonable, Assistant Police Chief Joe Reed straightens him out.

I am not a cop-hater. I prefer to get along with cops. Harmony helps the paper fulfill its duty to our readers. And a smart police officer knows how to get along with bona fide reporters and photographers. That officer isn't toadying any more than we are; he's enhancing his public service.

Los Angeles cops, detectives, and investigators fit none of the extremes of stage, films, or fiction. They are not derbied, dumb plainclothesmen whose blunders are supposed to be humor. In uniform, they are not graying, corpulent veterans who talk with an Irish brogue (or Brooklynes or Chicagoese). They are not scintillating masterminds whose incisive cerebrations solve the bafflers, preferably miles from "the scene of the crime," by scientifically evaluated clues (undetected by all except the hero), or by strategic drinking among movie stars in a chromium Hollywood (meaning Sunset Strip or Beverly Hills) cocktail bar, or among the winos in a downtown dive. When I see or read such fictional caricatures, I want to escape, as the suspect never does in fiction. These misrepresentations are a libel on the good Los Angeles cops, exceeded perhaps by the cinema travesties of news photographers and reporters, particularly newspaperwomen.

In focusing on Los Angeles police as one would on other vocational groups, one must stipulate that there are dumbheads among them. That's the law of averages. Dumb cops seldom think they're dumb; these, especially harness bulls who don't have much contact with reporters, believe they're sharp citizens. Similar complacency may afflict reporters, politicians, doctors, lawyers, crooners, and sewer cleaners.

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One seasoned newspaperman calls the sort "egostupes"; his elaborate definition boils down to a fusion of stupidity, arrogance, and egotism.

What is a Los Angeles cop, especially the homicide detective, really like?

In the first place, he doesn't wear a derby. He fancies an expensive hat with the sheen of newness; it may be snap-brimmed, bound or raw, but it won't have the short down-slope that suggests what is supposed to be a Park Avenue sport or the fast-talking "eye" who gets beaten to a pulp and revives, bandaged, in the next scene to solve the crime in the movies. (And his lingo doesn't include terms like "eye" or "shamus.")

His suits are not cheap, though they don't always look well pressed, and while not loud, would hardly be called dark, conservative business numbers. His neckties, however, shout like a movie homicide detective—a bark which the L.A. McCoys stifle.

If they are foppish about their ties, they are vainer in their searches to turn up the snazziest bands for their wrist watches. There is nothing sissy about the bracelet competition, for the bands bind brawny wrists, backing up tremendous fists, made more lethal by heavy rings on the third finger of the left hand. That's one reason they don't get beaten up like movie detectives; they know how to use those fists. The bands are dreams of matinee idols' jewelers: gold stretch, mesh, hand-tooled leather, or carved silver. If one of these lads keeps looking at his watch, he's not worried about the time, he's trying to display his newest bracelet to his associates, even if he has to roll back his shirt cuff to guarantee they'll see it. Donors would be nasty if they ever awarded him a pocket watch as a testimonial.

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These homicide men are extensive note-takers, and they've liked gold mechanical pencils for their jottings, while reporters stood near-by scribbling with stubs of copy pencils on wads of copy paper. Before I was assigned to the city desk, the ball-point pen craze stampeded the detectives into a scramble as furious as the vying over watch bands. The forgery detail was sour, aware that the ball-pen signature would simplify the job of professional forgers.

Like the average Angeleno, most Los Angeles cops migrated from other parts of the nation. One of the few L.A. natives whom I've encountered is David A. Davidson, former chief. The sheriff's office is flavored more with old California; the ancestors of Sheriff Eugene W. Biscailuz were Spanish and Basque pioneers under the kings of Spain.

Most Los Angeles cops are picked young and retire in middle age. For the last several years, officers who entered the force in the 1920's have been leaving in their prime forties, to hunt and fish on little ranches wisely bought in southern Oregon, to guard industrial plants, or to become minor fixers or bouncers at gambling joints.

Until the war, when a few misbehaving emergency appointees vexed the old-timers, recruits were selected for superior stature as well as youth. The typical L.A. cop is a big fellow. With age he may expand, but he doesn't become paunchy, although he may like beer as well as those reporters with whom he may drink. Big fellow by nature, the L.A. cop is proud of his physique. He's apt to practice wrestling—including judo, handy in rough spots. The weight-lifting vogue is building up muscles, which the rounder sort may be pleased to flex for that type of woman who thinks a cop in or out of uniform is an Adonis to the Venus she knows she is.

Not to be too tough on cops who think they're heaven's

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gift to women, it must be admitted that among males and callings they're not alone in that belief. As far as that goes, there is a misapprehension which questions the morals of newspaperwomen. I neither defend nor accuse my sisters. Tramps usually are pretenders in the profession. The best newspaperwomen I've known are very moral women. I know many fine cops, too. From the time I was slim and unworldly on the old *Record*, through the years I grew more matronly on the *Herald-Express*, they invariably have been gentlemanly. Many of these rugged officers have not so much as sworn in my presence, although I've been pretty handy at swearing myself, especially when I felt a cop was needlessly impeding coverage of a story.

My dealings with cops have been on a professional, businesslike level. I like to see them do their work well, so that I can do my own work well. There is no gloating when an upstart is detected in crookedness or "police brutality"—and there are such bad actors. One giant cop, up for hearing on charges of having maltreated a ninety-pound prisoner, attacked Cliff Wesselman, the photographer, who was making a routine picture, Casey Shawhan, then a *Herald* reporter, stepped in for the opposition photog and beat the tar out of the giant.

The other officers probably agreed with Casey rather than setting their sights to get him. When Casey's young son was dying, gnarled homicide detectives as well as *Herald-Express* staff members volunteered blood transfusions. Detectives and cops laid off work to attend the funeral. It is hard to believe these men brutes. Among the softest-hearted mortals I've encountered are the cops in the city marshal's office. On home evictions, adhering to the letter of the law, they reluctantly move the household to the street, believing each family has been given a bum deal. There is police brutality;

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however, many of the current accusations arise from political agitation. Smarter officers prefer the suaver methods of the F.B.I.

As a woman, I have neither asked nor expected deference from the police, even on dangerous stories. Brush fires on the dry southern California hills can isolate and trap one in an instant; and one night, racing up Roosevelt Highway along the ocean to a fire behind Malibu, I was halted by a uniformed deputy sheriff.

"It makes no difference if you are a reporter," he said. "No woman can go in there."

A voice spoke from the dark, and a uniformed man came forward from the roadside group. "It's all right, lad," he told the deputy, "she's been to a hell of a lot more of these things than you ever have. Go on through, Aggie." He was Inspector Norris G. Stensland of the sheriff's office.

Behind his attitude was the hundreds of times I'd worked on stories with law-enforcement officers. What may have originally caused their decision that I was no sissy is my control of my reaction to blood and cadavers. I don't claim a rigid stomach; greasy food or inferior drink quickly make me retch while disbelieving companions may be enjoying the fare. On stories, however—as on the Wanderwell sea burial—I seem to keep my stomach in line.

Homicide officers and harness bulls were clustered around an Eagle Rock house one day when I pulled up on what had been flashed as a double-mystery death. They were waiting for a room to ventilate. After ten days, the corpses were overwhelmingly overripe. A burning gas heater indicated accidental asphyxiation while the couple was in intimacy on a living-room couch. The man had been identified, the woman not. I wanted to catch the next deadline, which was close, so I made a deal with Captain H. A. (Bert) Wallis of L.A.

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homicide to enter the living room and bring out what obviously was the woman's purse resting on a table.

The woman, on the couch, was nude except for a slip rolled up about her chest. The man, union-suited, apparently had toppled backward to the floor. A segment of his anatomy had burst. I had to step over his body to reach the table. I tried to hold my breath; the stench choked in. (Later I sent my brown wool dress to the cleaners; but the odor persisted. I had hated to befoul that dress, for it had cost more than I thought I could afford. I had seen it in a store window and had paid a dollar down and a dollar a week until I could take it out. I had had bad luck with it. Whenever I put it on, my assignments had led to decaying human flesh. I finally quit wearing it.)

I grabbed the purse and, in the fresh air outside, handed it to Cap Wallis, who gave me a head start on the rest of the story. A bankbook in the purse disclosed the woman's identity. She was not married to the part-time paramour she had joined in the "death tryst." Though well fixed, she was a saloon pickup, checking revealed. We shagged pictures on her and caught the deadline—exclusively. My stomach kept intact, although when Albert C. (Smitty) Smith, the photographer, suggested lunch on the way back to the office, I admitted I wasn't hungry.

In another mystery death, cops and fellow newspapermen urged that I view the autopsy on Thelma Todd, blond movie star, in the county morgue. I agreed as a matter of course, although I suspected they were testing me. The body, nude and beautiful, was rigid against the slab sheet on which it lay. On surrounding tables were the bodies of seven men, shot and killed when a workman went berserk on a WPA storm-drain ditch-digging project. I ignored the male

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cadavers and watched the surgeon go to work on what tragically was left of a cinema rainbow.

Flaxen tresses were parted across the top of the head, the scalp quickly cut from ear to ear and one piece pulled to the front, the other to the back, exposing the skull. An electric saw circled the scalp bone in a disc which, about four inches across, was chiseled out. The brain—in which was stilled the secret of her death—was lifted. I looked up. Except for coroner's aides, I was alone beside the slab. One by one, cops and reporters had drifted away in what became a stampede to Hall of Justice rest rooms. My stomach held.

Paul Dorsey, whose camera later covered the gore of war, was one of the stampedes—Paul was with me the day I kicked Casey Shawhan in the shin. A man had shot and killed his next-door neighbor's wife and himself in a love tragedy. At the door, a uniformed cop forbade me to enter. "You can't go in there, lady," he said. "It's pretty bad in there. It's no place for a woman. It's a mess of blood all over."

"Don't worry about her," Paul told the cop. "She can take it. Worry about me. Chances are that I can't."

We went in. Paul came out retching. I came out with the pictures—and the oaths of my friend, Casey Shawhan.

On another story, tagged the "lady in red" shooting, I got a tip that the police were going to search a house for the pistol used by the woman, who had walked into a dinner party and shot and seriously wounded her common-law husband when she found him there with another woman. I was at the house when two homicide detectives, Aldo Corsini and Thad Brown, arrived. They were concerned about two things: how I had known they were going to search the house, and a huge gaunt police dog, unfed and unwatered for several days. The dog was barking fiercely behind a windowpane.

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"Look, Thad," I said, "Corsini and I will go to the back door and make one hell of a noise and distract the dog. While we're doing that, Thad, you go in through the window, right there beside the front door, then unlock the front door and rush out. I'll go in then and tame your dog; I'm not afraid of him."

Corsini and I diverted the dog and returned to the front porch, where Thad was wiping his brow.

Somewhere I had heard that dogs are aggressive because they are afraid of humans, who, standing taller, look bigger, and that if one stooped and thus cut oneself down to the dog's size, the animal would be placated. I didn't know whether the theory had been proved or not, but, probably without the good sense the detectives showed, I opened the door and crouched before the barking dog. I was scared to death, but darned if I'd back out.

His snarls became less assured. Cautiously I worked my hand forward to his shoulder and then to the back of his head, which I stroked with a minimum of movement. "What's the matter, fellow?" I said. "You hungry and thirsty?" Barks became a whimper.

I stood up and found the kitchen, the dog following. When I turned on the sink faucet, he began to pant. I gave him water and found his food, and he was my friend. Corsini and Thad came in and we searched the house. The pistol was found in a laundry bag. Thad, now deputy police chief, still blushes when anybody asks him whether he's tamed a wild police dog lately. So does Corsini, now a top investigator for the district attorney's office. I suppose I had more brass than judgment.

Subsequent to the dog day, Thad became captain of homicide. Other homicide captains with whom I have worked

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stories through the years include Wallis, and Dalton Patton, Jack Donahue, Edgar Edwards, and Vern Rasmussen, later police chief in near-by Glendale. These men always were businesslike and gentlemanly.

Some of their aides, however, have not bubbled perspicacity. For instance, a homicide crew once allowed the fire department salvage squad to clean out an apartment and then, too late, awoke to the suspicion that the two elderly women, found unconscious in the place, were victims of a murderer. Both women subsequently died.

A likely patrolman graduated to plainclothes is not necessarily homicide-detective material. Nor is it enough that he has the friendship of a prevailing clique such as those which contended for dominance in intra-departmental politics in the past. Knowledge of the underworld is not sufficient, either. That pays off more consistently in, say, the burglary detail, especially when an organized ring is operating with professional fences. Obviously, all slayings are not committed by case-hardened criminals whose fingerprints, photos, and records lie conveniently in the record bureau. Many homicides are acts of passion, temper, or premeditation by persons who never have been arrested. An arrogant cop, not long out of harness and a radio car, may buy himself a twenty-dollar hat and grim-lip in what he thinks are the motions; these do not make him a homicide detective. He is the kind who will try to bottle up every fact, as if suppression and phony mystery would step up his importance. Or, if he talks, he'll lie, too stupid to realize that truth and reporters will trip him a few hours later.

Homicide captains wish they had more men qualified for the rank of detective lieutenant, a title given generously by reporters to many detective sergeants. Paradoxically, one of

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the best homicide detectives I've known never advanced beyond the rating of sergeant, although we referred to him as a detective lieutenant. Repeatedly he sweated through civil service examinations—and remained a sergeant. Yet, on the witness stand under cross-examination by skilled criminal lawyers, he was cool and minutely authoritative, never stumbling into the verbal lapses which, as experienced investigators know, may blast the most carefully prepared case.

For weeks now I have raked the past and checked with contemporaries in the sincere wish to tabulate detectives to whom I could apply the adjective "brilliant." Not one stands up under analysis, even though I'm inclined in their favor. However, I do not consider this an indictment of the efficiency of Los Angeles law-enforcement officers. Unless external interests interfere, they are, by and large, conscientious workmen. The very absence of the spectacular may aid efficacy.

Homicide detectives included, they are thrown into a case cold and work with the facts and equipment at hand. They use horse sense—and are at their best when they do so. As for equipment, the L.A. department has much of the best, and the officers know how to use it, from the record bureau to the scientific laboratory. Lieutenant Lew Davis is in command of the lab. There Lieutenant Leland Jones does outstanding work.

Dr. Paul DeRiver, department psychiatrist, analyzes the quirks of every homicide and major crime. These men merit the term of criminologist, and they co-operate intelligently with reporters.

Prejudiced perhaps by the *Herald-Express* urge to be "first with the latest," I've felt there has been horsing around in various investigations. Sometimes the delay is in outlying

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divisions where a detective captain may try to take refuge in, "How can I tell you what my men have got? They're not here; they're out on the case." The captain may be acting too big for his britches or he may be surly over what he regards as a transfer to the 'sticks. When sweet reason fails, the recourse is to say something like, "Well, gahdammit, don't sit there on your fat end. Put in a radio call for them." In obstinate cases, I didn't waste time, for I had none to waste. My solution now would be to call Assistant Chief Joe Reed. There have been instances when solutions were not so simple.

A cop exiled to the sticks usually is a sorehead and, if he believes newspaper criticism nudged his banishment, he smolders against all newspapermen. When I've fathomed his resentment, I've said:

"Look, mister, you may be sore at me because I'm a reporter, or you may be just sore at the world. I'm not doing anything to you. But you're doing something to me—with this damned stalling. And I don't want to do anything to hurt you. You seem to think you're out here because you're in bad. Don't make it worse. Let's get along. What do you say?"

Usually the plea works. In fact, at this writing I can't recall any cops who really are being rousted by L.A. newspapers. There are veteran newspapermen who feel that dailies have gone soft in disdaining to retaliate when a reporter or a photog is pushed around—or kneed in the groin—by a cop.

Two of the most effective detective executives I've known are Captain Gordon Bowers of sheriff's homicide, and Vern Rasmussen, who later became the Glendale chief. Like a city editor in a huddle with reporters and photographers on a big story, they'll sit down with their men, talk over every circumstance, including intangibles—and edit.

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They don't become cluttered in chaff. They have the instincts of experienced reporters or rewritemen in knowing what is pertinent. Then again, like a city editor who knows how to call his shots, they detail assignments so that each man knows what he is to cover without overlapping his co-workers. These methods save time which, crucial to prevent, say, a getaway, is, with several deadlines a day, also important to newspapermen.

A reflective officer knows he must shoot with a rifle instead of a shotgun in L.A. investigations. It is possible to drive fifty-six miles from point to point within the city limits, for example from Chatsworth in the San Fernando Valley to the harbor at Wilmington and San Pedro. The Los Angeles Police Department is responsible for 453.322 square miles, the largest municipal area in the world. To serve this geographical giant, the department has a personnel of 4,333. That does not mean there are more than four thousand cops busy stalking the city to prevent crime and to seize offenders. The figure includes administrative help, and almost one thousand are under Deputy Chief Bernard R. Caldwell, in charge of coping with L.A.'s traffic.

To cover the city's five thousand and more miles of rambling streets, there are one hundred and fifty radio automobiles, and three hundred patrolmen walking beats. Trying to divide this number among the yawning five thousand-plus miles through twenty-four hours a day amid a two-million population gives Chief Horrall a headache. Of course whenever the heat has been on the department in the past, the diversionary defense has been, "Give us more men." Self-serving or not, the cry is not unwarranted.

Dearth of personnel helps belie the saying, "Crime does not pay," too often accepted as a truism. In its ramifications, crime is a billion-dollar industry, with tentacles feeding on,

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and protected by, "respectability." Crime pays, too, for the sneak thief, too petty to be tracked down. Every department has its unsolved crimes which mortify honest cops who try to realize the public's expectation of a thousand per cent batting average.

So it is with "Murder will out" and "There is no perfect crime." Plenty of murderers, undetected and unsuspected, are loose among society. Other slayers, though apprehended, are free, thanks to muddle-headed juries or prosecution. Many do "get away with murder."

In the city of Los Angeles, homicide detectives wrestle a killing every two or three days; the department lists 131 murders in 1946, and 119 in 1947. Most of these homicides, under "routine" investigation and prosecution, emerge as open-and-shut cases resulting in convictions. These are the love, jealousy, revenge, drunks, money, or "honest-we-were-only-fooling" sort: girl shoots boy friend; man shoots other guy who chiseled girl friend or wife. But even a minimum of unsolved slayings, particularly if they come too close together, jitter the cops and may lead to the inevitable shake-up in a police department. In a clutch, pressure on homicide detectives may be powerful, not so much from an "aroused public" as from those who fear their shrewdly wrought *status quo* is being jeopardized.

It's the unscarred citizens turned killers who, with luck or cunning, may be the most perplexing and elusive in mysteries. To pick up their tracks in thousands of miles of streets—even when the victim is dumped near a sidewalk, as in the "Black Dahlia" butcher murder—is a challenge indeed.

At the other extreme are the malice-aforethought egotists, so self-assured that they stick by the scene of the crime, brazenly kibitzing the investigators.

## 7

## A Gallery of Murderers

**T**HERE is no "killer type," so far as I have been able to distinguish in covering scores of slayers.

Some killers are obvious. Others are disarmingly convincing in their avowals of innocence, especially to those who distrust "circumstantial evidence," which experienced homicide detectives and prosecutors know may be as conclusive as a confession in open court.

Slayers range all ages, all sexes including those who are not sure to which sex they belong. Homicide is expected from the hoodlum, the gun moll, the gulled lover. It isn't from the teen-ager, the word-sweet old lady, the fragile housewife, the respectable gent who is the proverbial pillar of society.

They kill with pistol, rifle, or shotgun; with the blade—the melodramatic dagger outflashed by unheroic butcher knives or ice picks in quicker, more workmanlike jobs; with poison, subtle or crude; with ax, hatchet or hammer; with cord, or necktie which, before lethal gas became legal execution in California, foreshadowed the noose at San Quentin; with fake accidents; with blunt instrument or bludgeons, or with phony drownings.

They do not run true to form. What they have in common is killing. Similarities may be discounted as coincidental. I've known murderesses who were fine seamstresses—like Louise Peete. They seem to prefer the pistol to the handier scissors.

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I've talked to and observed killers at all junctures: during investigation before they were even suspected; in arrest and interrogation, having aided detectives in questioning many; through jail, trial, sentence, and prison.

Stories have been printed that I've "solved crimes." Let me say once and for all that I'm not a reporter who thinks she's smarter than the cops. Mostly I've been one of the legion of general-assignment reporters who throughout the nation are ready, willing, and able in an instant to get atop assignments as they are dealt by the city desk, whether they involve interviewing a politician, going to a fire, or covering a crime story.

It was the money urge that turned Laurel H. Crawford, forty-one, Pasadena postman, into a murderer. At six o'clock on the morning of December 12, 1939, Paul Pangburn, photographer, and I were sent up Mount Wilson, where the observatory is situated, to cover what appeared to be the traffic deaths of five persons: Crawford's wife, Elva Ruth; his three children, Alice Betty, fifteen, Helen Jeanette, eight, and Paul Harvey, ten; and Ralph Barnett, sixty-one, a roomer in the Crawford home.

Crawford, sympathetic deputy sheriffs told us, had lost control of his light sedan, panicked and jumped as it left the road and hurtled one thousand feet down the mountainside, the crash killing the other five occupants.

Because of Crawford's "ordeal," deputies refused to allow me to talk to him as he lay resting on a cot in a forest ranger's station up the mountain. As with Warden Houlihan on the Clara Phillips story at Tehachapi, I made a deal with a deputy who talked to Crawford while I listened in an adjoining room. I managed to look at him and observed the condition of his clothes.

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Some of the deputies were miffed when I refused to join them in their concern over the unfortunate man. They wanted to get him home and away from his grief as fast as possible. Lieutenants Garner Brown and Paul Mahoney of the sheriff's bureau of investigation, which includes homicide, came up the mountain. Brown asked:

"What do you think of it, Aggie?"

"I think it smells. He's guilty as hell," I answered flatly. Deputies were aghast. Brown listened to my reasons:

Crawford's shoes, leather jacket, and khaki shirt and pants showed not enough scuff, tear, wrinkle, and soil to substantiate his claim that he had clambered down the mountain to the wreckage and back up again a couple of times. Tearfully he said he had picked up the body of his daughter, Helen, amid the debris. There was no blood on his clothes; the girl's body was crushed and bloody. For several hours after the "accident," he had not gone for help. Later, presumably dazed and wandering, he had flagged, as we say in journalese, a passing motorist.

These were a few of the details, tangible or intangible, that I cited. On the intangible side, I did not like the way Crawford's story rang. "Why did this have to happen to me?" he moaned. "It was such a beautiful night. I took them up to see all the lights from Mount Wilson. I loved my wife so much . . ." I know what grief is when I see or hear it. Sometimes it's voluble, sometimes unexpressed.

One does not know when a hunch, if there is such a thing, ceases to be chimerical and becomes solid enough to grasp. One does know what horse sense is. And, to Garner Brown, I was talking horse sense, backed up by experience in observing hundreds of slippery criminals. I thought Crawford was acting—overacting.

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Garner put a hold on him. Thus—not because his action seemed to endorse my belief—Garner evinced the ability of Sheriff Gene Biscailuz' department. Garner Brown, youngish, studious and more like a G-man than a cop, is one of the career reliables who police 3,000 of the total of 4,083.21 square miles in Los Angeles County. Such men are Gene's mainstays, he himself being regarded by many as Los Angeles' most popular public official. Gene's department is not jittery—possibly because his office is not appointive like that of a police chief, but elective. Gene, now in his fortieth year in the department, is serving his fourth elective term. Genial in appearance, he knows how to apply discipline. If the sheriff's office has dirty linen, it's not laundered in public.

Laurel Crawford's linen, believed so immaculate by the deputies, began to show smudges when he was taken to the Altadena substation and then to his home for questioning. Parental opposition excluded reporters and photogs from the house. It was the routine of "my poor boy, what are they doing to you?" Later it was, "He wouldn't have been in all this trouble if it hadn't been for the newspaper reporters." In viewing the "We'll-stick-by-you" assurances from relatives and friends, one wonders whether they show fidelity—or smugness in reflected notoriety, condonation, or chagrin over being caught, and to hell with the victims. In the Crawford house, reporters were represented nevertheless. Then an *Examiner* reporter, Sid Hughes, who can look like a cop, served for all of us.

Sid also can act like a detective—at his best. He found, concealed in a radio, insurance policies on each of the victims, grossing \$30,500 in value. Some of the policies had double indemnity clauses. Crawford was beneficiary. The motive was clear. Under Brown and Mahoney the investi-

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gation sewed up odds and ends, such as the fact that the automobile brakes were in good condition.

I covered the joint funeral of the wife and three children Crawford claimed to have loved so greatly. Later I was assigned to his trial. One day, toward the end of the case, Deputy District Attorney John Barnes told me he had awakened during the previous night with a solution to a puzzle of figures scribbled on a piece of paper found with the insurance policies in the Crawford house. CIPHERING, John said, showed that the numbers represented income Crawford hoped to harvest in the slayings. In evidence and in closing argument, the prosecutor emphasized the sums and cinched the circumstantial evidence. Crawford was sentenced to four consecutive life terms in San Quentin with recommendation that he never be paroled.

Even more brazen than Crawford, who at least was armed with literacy, was moronic weaselly Albert Dyer, thirty-two, WPA crossing guard, kidnapер-slayer of the "three little babes of Inglewood," as the victims were called. For two days after Madeline Everett, seven, Melba Marie Everett, nine, and Marjorie Stephens, eight, vanished on June 26, 1937 from Centinela Park, an old fig orchard near their homes in the Fairview Heights section of Inglewood, the case was a kidnaping mystery.

As posses traversed the near-by Baldwin Hills, a cactus-specked no man's land full of ravines between Inglewood and a populous southwestern district of Los Angeles, the city desk made me field city editor of the crew of reporters and photogs assigned to the story.

Outnumbering us was the opposition, whose high powers aimed to disconcert us with whispering huddles. Perry countered by buzz-buzzing in my ear, saying nothing, after

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which we'd dash to his automobile and scamper away, the opposition trailing. After we had cry-wolfed them several times on wild-goose chases, they became bored, and Perry, the *Herald* crew and I were able to develop elbow-room in which to seek exclusive angles.

Lest anyone think I believe myself a gee-whiz in solving crimes, I have been kicking myself for more than eleven years because I didn't shell out a dollar to a grimy slattern who, bicycling up to a bunch of newspapermen, announced she knew what had happened to the girls and, for a dollar in beer money, would tell. Had she been at a bar caging drinks, Perry or I would have bought her several and thought nothing of it. As it was, the other newspapermen and I, with the contempt of drinkers for drunks, dismissed her as a crackpot, and she pedaled away muttering.

Perhaps our obtuseness arose from the fact that we were having cop trouble. We were knee-deep in cops—from the L.A. department, from the district attorney's office, including the high brass, and from Inglewood. As the big man on home territory, the Inglewood police chief fell into bustling importance. In these great moments in little careers, some public officials pretend to regard reporters' questions as outrageous interference with duty to the public—seeming to forget that the public collects its facts from newspapers.

Finally, in the presence of his men and other cops who laughed in his face, I told the chief, "All right, now, are you going to hold still long enough to answer reasonable questions from us, or are you going to act like just another gahdam cow-town cop?" There was a compromise in which he agreed to press conferences twice a day.

Through the confusion, Dyer, always wearing his crossing-guard cap, was busy kibitzing. "I sure wish they'd find those

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“kids,” he’d babble. “I knew them real well. I used to help them cross the street to and from school every day. Yessir, I knew ‘em well.” He was regarded as a simpleton trying to muscle into the spotlight.

I was telephoning the office on June 28, when Perry rushed up, exclaiming, “They’ve just found the bodies, all three of them. They’re all dead. I grabbed a Boy Scout who was running to the City Hall. The kid saw them . . .” That was our flash—on *Herald* time. Perry would be a good reporter any day he decided to lay down his camera.

Each of the girls had been garroted with separate short lengths of rope. After death each had been violated repeatedly. Dyer, still unsuspected, helped carry the bodies out. News pictures showed him in the van of the bearers; other shots recorded him prominently among the City Hall throngs before and after the murders were discovered.

Belatedly a schoolboy came forward with an account of improper advances from Dyer, and word of the bicycling slattern’s beer-money offer reached investigators. She helped put the finger on Dyer, with tales of intimacy including husband-swapping. He was taken in custody on July 4, eight days after the slayings.

Dyer, mindful of possible mob action in Inglewood, where the Ku Klux Klan was vigorous in the early 1920’s, confessed. He had enticed the girls, who trusted him as a guard, into the hills on the promise of showing them how to hunt rabbits. There, one by one, he took each of the victims out of sight of the others and killed her. Then he attacked the remains. Near the bodies he lined up their shoes in a neat row. I covered the girls’ funerals and later Dyer’s trial. He was hanged in San Quentin on September 16, 1938.

Although he kept in view of investigators, Dyer banked

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on anonymity to conceal his identity as a killer; apparently he had no connection with the slayings. In attempting to evaluate such audacity, one is impressed with the egomania of those like Laurel Crawford or Samuel Whittaker, sixty-five, church organist, who believe they can avoid suspicion even though their presence at the death scene qualifies them for being held as material witnesses. Dyer depended on mystery; Crawford and Whittaker, on glibness, which they assured themselves would keep them above suspicion.

Early on the morning of March 18, 1936, I talked to Whittaker, a tall, gray-haired, respectable citizen, rived with anguish over the death of his wife, Ethel, forty-four, shot and killed the night before during a holdup in their hotel room on Alvarado Street opposite Westlake Park. He was verbose in declarations of love for his wife, to whom he had been married sixteen years. Maybe I realized that marital affection, though it may persist to a golden wedding anniversary, becomes quieter in its manifestations through middle and old age. There was something counterfeit in Whittaker's demeanor. I said nothing, for here was a man who made his living in church. Notwithstanding, I began to suspect him as a sanctimonious old scoundrel.

Through the co-operation of L.A. Homicide detectives, Whittaker was taken to General Hospital, where the suspected slayer, James Fagan Culver, twenty-one, was in the prison ward. At that point, Whittaker still was an elderly hero who had shot the bandit who had killed Mrs. Whittaker. Culver, not wounded seriously, was brought outside to the prison-ward courtyard so that other hospital prisoners would not be disturbed. I wanted an "I accuse" picture of Whittaker pointing at the slayer.

Fortunately, Whittaker carried a cane, which made a

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dramatic pointer. As Perry lined up the shot, however, Whittaker stood too far from the suspect. An eight-column cut would have been required to reproduce the photograph. Several times I urged Whittaker to close the gap; he would move an inch nearer, then stop. Finally I took him by the arm and moved him to within a cane's distance of Culver.

As Whittaker raised his cane to point and the flash bulb clicked, I saw him deliberately wink—with his right eye, the farthest from the group behind the camera—at Culver. Evidently I was the only person to see the wink, except for the suspect. I waited for a repetition—it could have been nervousness or the symptom of an affliction. Unobtrusively I drew the detective, Thad Brown, aside and told him what I had seen.

"Thad," I said, "ask that kid why Whittaker winked at him. Don't let the kid wriggle out of it. Whittaker did wink at him. There's no mistake about it." Thad assured me I was crazy and had an overactive imagination. But, questioning the suspect, he cracked the plot. Giving him a pair of shoes and paying him small sums of money, Whittaker had hired Culver to stage a fake holdup in the unlocked room, ostensibly to cure Mrs. Whittaker of "carelessness" about her jewels.

Whittaker had provided Culver with a .38 caliber revolver. When the youth kept what was supposed to have been a harmless stickup date, Whittaker, whom Culver had not expected to be armed, started firing with a .32-20 snub-nose. He killed his wife and wounded his confederate, who, frightened, escaped to a near-by roof, where effective police work captured him.

Whittaker's plan snagged when Culver fled before he could be killed and silenced. Whittaker had figured he would be acclaimed for his fearless defense of himself and

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his wife, for outshooting the bandit who slew Mrs. Whittaker. Age, respectability, and bereavement, the husband believed, would carry him through to collect Mrs. Whittaker's \$18,000 double-indemnity insurance.

In its fundamentals, the stratagem seemed simple. However, with two pistols and the possibility of two autopsies involved, the facts became complicated. A myriad of obvious questions suggest themselves, but it is not the purpose of this record to compile a crime casebook. Indeed, this and other chapters could be expanded to whole volumes; in fact, single cases mentioned here offer enough material for a mystery thriller. Boiled down, there was one gross flaw in Whittaker's scheme: he took a chance that ballistic tests of the death bullets would be skipped or inaccurate. However, the police department made the tests, which proved the bullets came from the pistol held by Whittaker.

Of course this grumpy old gent didn't like me. I saw a great deal of him after he was charged with murder and through the days I covered his trial, in which he was given a life sentence for killing his wife and a one- to ten-year term for shooting Culver. One of his pious quotes was that he hoped God would strike him dead if he was guilty of killing his wife. When he was being booked into San Quentin, he dropped dead.

Lining up a death-scene photograph aided in detection of a slaying plotter in the "orchid murder" of Helen Wong, twenty-one, a beautiful Chinese girl. She was found choked and strangled in bed at her home on the east side, near downtown Los Angeles, on May 12, 1942, the day before she planned to be married. The homicide took its tag from an orchid lying on a table beside her bed. Fellow employees had presented it to her at a party in honor of her coming wed-

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ding. The slaying was uncovered when her fiancé, Harry Chun, twenty-eight, also a high-class Chinese, was slugged as he called to drive her to a defense plant where the pair worked. Dazed, he thought he had seen a Negro fleeing.

I talked to a number of persons, including the victim's relatives, who, since they were in the house, were classified as suspects or material witnesses. One of them was Eddie Yerk, thirty, a cousin, to whom I spoke in the front room. I don't say I had a definite reason to suspect him, but I wanted to see his attitude as he was faced with the body, and I wanted to set up a dramatic picture, which Tom Courtney, *Herald-Express* photographer, was prepared to shoot.

I asked Harry S. Fremont, topside homicide detective with whom we have worked a number of big cases, to take Yerk beside the bed. When he refused, Fremont led him there. Showing none of the vaunted Oriental inscrutability, Yerk twisted his head away from the body and closed his eyes. "Why don't you look at her?" I insisted. As we got our picture, Fremont half-winked at me as if to say, "I think we've got something here."

He was right. Yerk confessed within twenty-four hours and was convicted of second-degree murder. According to the police, he opposed the marriage of his relative to Chun and hired a Negro, Simon Robinson, twenty-nine, to beat him up. The girl was accidentally killed when she was bound and gagged to keep her from warning Chun. Yerk said he only wanted to "scare Chun away."

Yerk and Robinson each were given six years to life in San Quentin.

As a rule, neither Chinese nor Japanese are often involved in Los Angeles crime, particularly homicide. Ray Giese, veteran homicide detective, says that usually one conversa-

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tion with the relatives or associates of a Japanese who is inclined to kick over the traces is enough to bring preventive discipline that keeps him straight. Filial respect is strong, and family members feel they have a duty to counsel and to protect the dignity of all concerned.

More crime solutions and arrests stem from news pictures than is realized. An example is the case of debonair Campbell MacDonald, twenty-six, in the Hollywood "moon-mad murder" of his mother, Margaret Campbell, fifty-six, film actress, on June 26, 1939. "I saw my picture in the *Evening Herald-Express*, and knew I couldn't get very far," he accounted for his surrender to two radio-car patrolmen on a Santa Monica street.

Thad Brown and I worked hard to get that picture. After the mother was found beaten to death with a claw hammer (as in the Clara Phillips case) in her bed, we were stymied in ransacking for photos of the fleeing son.

Unlike the Earhart household on my first assignment for the *Herald-Express*, the family with which mother and son roomed—they shared a single room—was co-operative. In the large house on Hawthorne Avenue near the Roosevelt Hotel and Grauman's Chinese Theater, the family lent shelter and use of the telephone as detectives and newspapermen staked out hoping for the suspect to return.

In a theatrical family like that of the victim, who was the divorced wife of the late Joseph Swickard, respected character actor, there had to be pictures somewhere, I felt sure. I helped the mother in the household wash and wipe dishes and chatted with her sixteen-year-old son, who finally remembered that a friend of the suspect probably had shots of him on standard thirty-five-millimeter motion-picture film.

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I told Thad. We went in quest of the film, whose owner yielded it reluctantly. As I recall, it was on positive, which we took to the Eastman laboratories for processing so that we could pull an eight-by-ten print suitable for newspaper reproduction. The *Herald-Express* came out first with the suspect's likeness.

Just as pictures are wedges for detection, confrontation and re-enactment at the scene of the crime are not play-acting by police and reporters. The routine has purpose: to shatter composure or amplify a confession that might be too sketchy to hold up in court. MacDonald was taken to the bloody bed where he crushed out the life of his mother and was quizzed on what appeared to be ritualistic objects with which he had desecrated the body.

This account is written from a *Herald-Express* clipping of June 30, 1939, that carried a column of bold-face question-and-answer quotes I phoned from that room. With Captain Dalton R. Patton and Warren Neeley, of homicide, and Dr. Paul DeRiver, police department psychiatrist, I asked many of the questions. The unwary might have accepted this killer as a cultured young man, courteous and handsome enough, with his even features and neat mustache, to be a leading man. Following are quick excerpts from the Q-and-A:

"She began picking on me . . . for reading too much, saying I was headed for a nervous breakdown. . . . She said . . . she was going to have me placed in an asylum. . . .

"I got up, and the moon was shining through the window and on the bed where my mother was asleep. I picked up the hammer and struck her several times. . . .

"It seems like an awful dream that when I was striking

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her with the hammer there was enough moonlight streaming through the window that I could do my work. . . .

"I awoke. Mother was lying in bed, all in a mess. Her nightclothes were on. . . . Then I left the room and walked down Hollywood Boulevard about 6:00 a.m. A naked man ran past me and called me a sap."

Strangely, a check of police records showed a report of a nude man on the boulevard at that time. This was murder in Hollywood more bizarre than any unwound from the reels at the near-by Chinese. The dialogue continues:

"Did she scream?" he was asked.

"No, I don't recall that she did."

"Why did you place the police whistle, the chapter of St. John's Gospel and the key near her?"

"I don't know."

"Was it a symbol with a meaning?"

"No . . ."

"Did you cry?"

"No, I haven't cried since I was a child."

"How much schooling have you had?"

"I attended school for three weeks, when my mother took me out of it. To this day I don't know why."

"Weren't you a normal child?"

"I think so. We just arrived in Los Angeles from New York, and I couldn't play games like other children when we were in New York. The reason was that we lived in an apartment and I couldn't go out to play. When I started school here I couldn't play with the other children because I didn't know how to play their games. . . ."

"How did you feel after killing your mother?"

"I felt relieved of my emotions for a short time. . . ."

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MacDonald was committed to the Mendocino State Hospital for the criminal insane.

Matricide can be the ugliest of crimes to cover, sometimes, as in this case, with undertones that are unprintable, although privileged when verified in official records. No matter how case-hardened one becomes, one is shocked when what appeared to be normal affection is revealed as having shrouded eccentricities ranging from so-called mother love to aberrations which baffle even psychiatrists.

I do not mean to imply that the physical act of incest is involved in these cases. Indeed, such violation, resulting in, say, revulsion, would be easier to comprehend as a cause of homicide. What is perplexing is how to determine where normal maternal or filial love edges over the border into the unplumbed blackness of the loathsome or the horrific.

One can understand putrefaction as a simple stench and view a neglected cadaver clinically. One can cover a love slaying, as I did once in a North Main Street rooming house, and see a girl whose liver has been hacked out and thrown into a corner of the room, one of her breasts cut off and the other nipple either torn or bitten off. Ghastly, yes; but homicidal simplicity when compared to the rottenness which pervades human minds and corrupts and drives out the decency that should endow and ennable one from birth.

In Westwood on May 30, 1934, when I saw the ax-cleft remains of Mrs. Carrie Payne, forty-one, and of her son, Robert, fourteen, I could understand the double murder as another in which the bodies lay undetected several days, and thus test once more my ability to withstand fetidness. I could understand the case as another ax murder and another matricide when an older son, Louis, twenty-one, was named as killer. But as the investigation progressed amid the odor,

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it was established that the body of the mother had been ravished after death. Such horror defies understanding. Even the indecencies that Albert Dyer inflicted on the lifeless "three little babes of Inglewood" were not incestuous. For Louis Payne, student, and scion of a well-fixed family, I can say that when I talked to him he seemed genuinely overwhelmed by what he had done. Mercifully, perhaps—at least he could not be charged with rational intent—he was held insane and committed to Mendocino, where a decade later he hanged himself with a sheet from his bed. Maybe in a glimmer of sanity he glimpsed the enormity of what he'd done. In cases like this and MacDonald's, the principal is subject to trial when lunacy disappears.

These are some of the homicides one general-assignment reporter has worked in Los Angeles. I have tried diligently to remember them all, but there have been too many, including the one-day wonders. The foregoing cross-section seems to support the point that there is no typical killer. Various slayers may have similar traits, and singular details in one murder may suggest details in another. Nonetheless, the facts don't appear to support the theory that one may look at a person and say accurately, "There's a killer." Impressionable women would have regarded Campbell MacDonald as charming.

It's not necessary for a female to be guileless to be charmed to death. The conquests of Robert S. James, thirty-eight, red-haired barber and "rattlesnake murderer," included reputable Los Angeles businesswomen whose office acumen should have been sharp enough to have seen through this cotton-picker Casanova. Homicide as effected by the cold-blooded James, as fiery in his amours as in his hair, is likely

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to be cited in more than one casebook, with him as an example of a modern double-indemnity Bluebeard.

If a wink caused me to suspect Whittaker, yawns made me doubt the innocence of James. After his wife Mary Busch James, thirty-five, had been found August 5, 1935, presumably accidentally drowned in a shallow fish pond at their home in a wild hilly section of La Cañada, the wire services carried a story that his previous wife, Winona, had died by drowning in a bathtub—also evidently a mishap. Perry and I called on James in an apartment in the Westlake district.

Before he answered each of my questions, James paused and yawned. He didn't look sleepy, and a man grieving over his wife isn't bored. I decided his yawns were stalls to gain him time to ponder every query before replying. I felt he was covering up. The more I thought, the more convinced I was that investigation might show he had slain his wife. In my routine checking, I said as much to the authorities, who were inclined to accept James' plausibility.

My suspicions were not exactly welcomed, though I presented them professionally and conservatively. Two veteran deputy sheriffs, whom I respected as competent, promised to hold the barber, then did not do so but laughed when I confided my thoughts.

From the point of view of some reporters, the James case was peculiar in that, at important junctures, some law-enforcement officers told barefaced lies. This could have been understood if James had been a gambling or vice-syndicate baron or a civic big shot who could have made trouble for the cops. But James had no connections in officialdom. He was the owner of a barber shop on Eighth Street near Grand Avenue in downtown L.A., a dozen blocks from the

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Civic Center. For all his attempts to be a metropolitan flash-guy, he still wore burrs of the Alabama cotton country where he was born under the fancy name of Major Raymond Lisenba.

Nevertheless, despite what seemed their initial indifference, the authorities did not neglect James. It could be said that they moved cautiously because James was a tough hombre to crack. His former wife's death, which had paid off on a \$14,000 double-indemnity insurance policy, had not been challenged, even though he had been under suspicion previously when he attempted a Laurel Crawford type of automobile accident near Pike's Peak. Apparently too stunned to know what had happened while James had "jumped to safety," Winona survived the accident—to die by drowning.

The L.A. case kicked around for eight months until April of the following year. By then the Los Angeles cops and the district attorney's office had moved into the investigation which originally was under the jurisdiction of the sheriff's office. The D.A.'s office, whose investigators are slower but thorough, brought the case to a head when James was arrested one Sunday morning in a South La Salle Avenue bungalow on charges of moral misconduct with his niece, a good-looking brunette, whom he had seduced.

Springing of the trap was made possible through the microphone efficiency of a squad under Police Captain Earl E. Kynette (later sent to San Quentin for the bombing of Harry J. Raymond). James was playing several women at once, and the microphone in his bedroom revealed perversions which included the use of a toy buggy whip in masochistic practices.

James was netted in an incest case; yet that didn't make

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him a murderer. Nobody dreamed of rattlesnakes. For days the authorities were still up a tree when a news source of Pat Foley, *Herald-Express* reporter on the district attorney's beat, revealed the existence of one Charles H. (Chuck) Hope, thirty-eight. Good sleuthing under the D.A.'s office on Pat's information turned up Hope, who was working as a cook at the beach.

Pat's work was reporting at its dramatic best and resulted in one of the greatest exclusives in the history of the *Herald-Express*.

Hope, who when down-and-out had been befriended by James, spilled the rattlesnake story. He told how he had been hired by James to buy the snakes and how Mary Busch James' leg had been exposed in a box containing the rattlers at the La Cañada house. When the venom didn't work fast enough, James drowned his wife in the bathtub and later put her body in the fish pond to simulate accidental death. Motive? Double indemnity insurance. The \$10,000 insurance on Mary was only \$3,500 when finally paid to James after a court fight.

I covered James' trial as well as the investigation, which I thought had lagged at times. He was sentenced to execution, and Hope, who had turned state's evidence, was given life in San Quentin.

While at San Quentin for the hanging of James—the last in California—I talked again to Hope, who repeated his earlier protestations that James alone was the actual killer. Hope sees himself as a hard-working guy who got in wrong through tough luck and booze. Occasionally he writes me from Quentin.

# 8

## In—and Out of—the Jails

I HAVE been in jail more times than I can remember. For every homicide case of which I've lost track, there must be a hundred or more visits I've made to jail—as a working reporter, of course.

The bulk of these calls were at the main city jail, Lincoln Heights, where around seven, morning after morning, a photog and I on the daily milk route would persuade or outmaneuver culprits reluctant to have their jams recorded. Most of these stories were grist that supported the supply of local news pictures.

Lincoln Heights is one of the many jails in Los Angeles County. Each of the police and the sheriff's substations as well as the smaller towns have cells or tanks which technically are jails. There is a jail in the police station at Hollywood, and, contrary to Eastern ideas of filmdom, not much happens there.

The County Jail is atop the Hall of Justice at Temple Street and Broadway. The building also houses sheriff's headquarters, the district attorney's office, criminal divisions of Superior and Municipal Court, grand-jury rooms, and other county offices. The County Jail contains those serving sentences, unbailed or unbailable suspects whose cases are in progress, and various federal prisoners. Of all the jails in which I've been, the County probably has yielded the most interesting interviews and cases. Big-timers on their way to the Big House board there.